



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER



F. Philip Prelli
Commissioner

Testimony to Mark Rey, Under Secretary
Natural Resources and Environment, USDA
at National Farm Bill Listening Forum
Berlin Fair Ground
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Secretary Rey, for the record I am F. Philip Prelli, Commissioner of Agriculture, State of Connecticut. It is my pleasure to be able to provide testimony today and thank you for coming to Connecticut.

As I am sure you are aware Connecticut has participated in many of the programs which have been part of the previous farm Bill. Over the last 10 years the State has averaged approximately 1 million dollars each year in the Farm and Farm Ranch Protection Program. What makes this even more impressive is that we have been able to leverage that with other State, municipal and not for profit organizations to preserve large quantities of Farmland in our State. Partnering with all these groups has helped make your effort more successful. Equal successes can also be shown with the EQIP and AFO-CAFO strategy grants as well as Crop Insurance, Senior Nutrition Program, Farm to School, Specialty Crop, Food Export, and many other cooperative agreements. This partnership between your agencies and mine is a vital ingredient in supporting Connecticut farmers. This would also include the regional work with which your agencies assist us. The farmers in our region would be at a severe disadvantage without the expertise of such agencies as NRCS, FSA, FAS, APHIS and the other affiliated agencies.

As we look forward to the 2007 Farm Bill we know that we will have to see changes. In the ever changing agricultural environment, issues will have to be addressed differently and sometimes at a greater speed than is currently available. Who knows how the existing World Trade discussions will affect Farm subsidies. We cannot afford to have this money leave the agricultural arena. This is not a major issue in the Northeast but we must find new and unique ways to funnel that money to our farmers to insure their viability.

We should look at using more Block Grant programs, by defining those in such a way that they can be changed to address the pertinent issues of the day. Making the application and reporting processes less bureaucratic and easier to follow would be a positive step. There are times now when it is questionable on whether it is worth the personnel time needed to apply and report on the grants for the amount received. Block Grants would allow us the flexibility to meet the needs of our constituents and ensuring the money reaches the farmers.

We must also continue to address the environmental needs of our farmers. As we have done under the past bill with funds to address the CAFO needs with clean water, we must now look to the new clean air concerns and help our farmers address this need. As this is not fully defined as yet, we will need to again be flexible in the way we approach this issue.

In Connecticut and the Northeast, specialty products and nitch markets are a major part of our agriculture venue. These include but are not limited to such products as Greenhouses and Nurseries, Broad Leaf Tobacco, Organic Farming, Mushroom, Shellfish, Poultry, Maple Syrup and other special crops. Many of our farmers sell their products at local farmers market or from their own farms. The Connecticut Grown Brand is respected and adds value to our product. Support for these programs should also be included in the 2007 Bill.

The Dairy industry is still a major concern in the Northeast. The Northeast Dairy Compact helped us ensure that Dairy remained viable and that local products were available to our Region. I understand that it will be difficult to reinstate the compact but needed to put a plug in for it. It was a program that helped our farmers with no taxpayer dollars. The MILC program has helped some of our smaller farmers and I would ask at minimum that this be continued.

In closing let me again thank you for being here. It is our responsibility to bring forward programs that not only assist our farmers and preserve agriculture but to make them easily accessible and flexible to meet the need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Philip Prelli', written in a cursive style.

F. Philip Prelli
Commissioner

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SECRETARY, D. USDA

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